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ABSTRACT

This report explores best practices of on- and off-campus disciplinary alternative programs in Texas. It is based on a study in which Texas' alternative-program practices were compared with best practices of alternative programs in the United States. Following a literature review of best alternative program practices, a survey was developed to solicit district and alternative program data, and was mailed to 1,042 school-district superintendents in Texas. The return rate for surveys was 39 percent. Fifteen districts, which reported no alternative programs, were excluded from the study. The remaining 101 on-campus program surveys and 291 off-campus program surveys were then analyzed to reveal best practices of Texas programs. Findings revealed the following best practices of Texas disciplinary alternative programs: (1) use of one-on-one instruction with the teacher (76.5 percent); (2) establishment of individual student goals for program planning (66.8 percent); (3) academic program at each student's functional reading level (60.2 percent); (4) staff development for teachers in conflict resolution (64.5 percent); (5) parent involvement at entrance or exit conferences for the program (76.5 percent); (6) the goal of success in the mainstream program after return to the home campus (73.2 percent); (7) no return trip to the alternative program (67.9 percent); and (8) improved academic achievement (61.5 percent). An appendix contains the Disciplinary Alternative School Program Survey. (Contains 24 references.) (RJM)

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Best Practices for Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs in Texas

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Abstract

A descriptive study was conducted to discover best practices of on- and off-campus disciplinary alternative programs in Texas. Texas alternative program practices were compared with best practices of alternative programs revealed through a literature review of best alternative program practices in the Nation.

A survey soliciting district and alternative program data was developed and mailed to 1042 school district superintendents in Texas. The return rate for surveys was 402 or 39%. Fifteen districts reporting no alternative program were excluded from the study. One hundred and one on-campus program surveys and 291 off-campus program surveys were analyzed to reveal best practices of Texas programs. Compiled district responses to survey items of 60% and greater that coincided with best practices revealed by the literature were deemed best practices for Texas programs.

Findings revealed the following best practices of Texas disciplinary alternative programs: (1) use of one-on-one instruction with the teacher (76.5%), (2) establishment of individual student goals for program planning (66.8%), (3) academic program at each student's functional reading level (60.2%), (4) staff development for teachers in conflict resolution (64.5%), (5) parent involvement at entrance or exit conference for the program (76.5%), (6) the goal of success in the mainstream program after return to the home campus (73.2%), (7) no return trip to the alternative program (67.9%), and (8) improved academic achievement (61.5%).

Best Practices for Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs in Texas

A growing concern for providing an orderly and safe public school learning environment spurred the 75th Texas Legislature to pass discipline legislation through House Bill 1 and Senate Bill 133, Chapter 37. Subsection 37.008 (m) to Chapter 37 called for mandatory placement in a discipline alternative program for conduct punishable as a felony, a terroristic threat, or an assault. Offenses outlined in the 1997 Texas Penal Code such as murder, aggravated assault, sexual assault, and murder also required mandatory removal from the regular school program whether the offense occurred on or off of a Texas public school campus.

Since the passage of the 1997 legislation, Texas school districts have implemented procedures for removal of disruptive and violent students. Alternative environments may include on-campus programs conducted in one classroom, wing, or area of a district facility, an off-campus program conducted in a separate building in a separate part of a community or county, or both. Currently, there is little Texas-specific information on disciplinary alternative program practices.

The purpose of this study was to determine current practices of on- and off-campus disciplinary alternative programs in Texas, determine best practices of programs derived from a review of the literature on alternative programs in the Nation, and compare Texas alternative program practices with best practices identified by the literature. Research on disciplinary program practices provides the Texas Legislature, the Texas Education Agency, and Texas school administrators with information for future

program policy development and implementation. Three research questions were developed for the study.

Research Questions

The three research questions addressed in this study follow.

Question 1

What are the current practices for on-campus public school disciplinary alternative programs in Texas?

Question 2

What are the current practices for off-campus public school disciplinary alternative programs in Texas?

Question 3

How do the current practices for on- and off-campus programs in Texas compare with best alternative program practices identified in the literature?

Description and Definition of Terms

A description and definition of terms provides clarity for word meanings and an explanation of terms as used in the study.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms provide meaning for terms used in the report:

1. Regular or traditional school program is the educational program used in the public, independent schools in the Nation.

2. Alternative program is an educational program designed to meet the needs of various learners and may employee innovative or modified organization, implementation, and evaluation.
3. Discipline alternative program is an on- or off-campus educational program designed to meet the needs of students expelled from the regular school program for disruptive and/or violent behavior.
4. On-campus alternative program is a program designed to meet the educational needs of students removed from the regular school program for disruptive and/or violent behavior. The alternative program is commonly housed in an isolated room or area of a school within the district.
5. Off-campus alternative program is a program designed to meet the educational needs of students removed from the regular school program for disruptive and/or violent behavior. The program is conducted in a building or structure separate from the regular school district campuses.

Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. Respondents possessed knowledge of the district discipline alternative program operation.
2. Respondents reported accurate discipline alternative program data.
3. The alternative school survey accurately measured practices of disciplinary alternative programs in Texas.

Limitations

1. The alternative data was collected for school district alternative programs in Texas, only.
2. Less than 50% of the 1042 surveys mailed were returned.
3. The survey instrument did not include all effective practices identified by the literature.

Review of the Literature

In the 1990's alternative programs developed out of a need to educate a growing number of school dropouts, students experiencing little or no success in the traditional school program, and an increasing number of students in the juvenile justice system (Haring, 1997; Quinn & Rutherford, 1998). Programs ranged from short-term in-school programs housed in a room or one wing of the school building to separate residential facilities designed for long-term custodial care and treatment. Whatever the instructional arrangement used, alternative programs provided a learning setting for students that failed in the regular school program (Glass, 1995).

Alternative school students display a wide range of difficulties that may encompass academic problems, behavior problems, social difficulties, or a combination of problems. Educators seek effective alternative program methods and strategies for helping students succeed in school and life (Quinn & Rutherford, 1998).

Successful Alternative Program Characteristics

In a study of educational alternatives for children and youth with emotional, behavioral and social problems, Quinn and Rutherford (1998) found six essential components of effective programs. The components included a needs assessment of student skills and learning needs; a flexible curriculum designed to meet the functional academic, social, and emotional needs of the student; innovative and effective instructional strategies; a transitional program that ties the alternative program to the regular school program; a system for providing internal school services and external

community services needed by students; and a highly trained staff. The effective programs molded program practices to meet the needs of the students served, rather than attempting to mold the student to fit the program. Adapting the program to meet the needs of students was revealed to be one of the main reasons programs were successful (Quinn & Rutherford, 1998).

Hadden (1997) in an in-depth analysis of one alternative education program in Georgia found that small class size was a crucial factor in program success. Small programs allowed teachers to teach and assist students individually and to stay alert to individual student concerns and problems. Effective programs used innovative teaching methods, student choice, a sense of belonging, and close relationships with teachers to steer students toward success.

In 1997 Jay Smink, Executive Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center conducted a review of best practices of alternative programs and discovered that many factors contribute to the success of programs, but that most programs displayed a common set of characteristics. Those characteristics included a maximum teacher to student ratio of not more than 1:10; a small student enrollment not to exceed 250 students; a clear mission and discipline code; a caring, well-trained staff that received continuous staff development; an atmosphere of high expectations for student achievement; a learning program customized to meet the needs of student expectations and learning styles; a flexible time schedule for student attendance; community involvement and support; and a total commitment to each student's success.

In a report on alternative programs by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (1999) entitled, "School Performance Review," successful alternative programs were identified as intellectually challenging; innovative, self-paced, and creative in meeting the needs of a variety of students. Also, successful programs had a strict discipline and dress code and provided intensive counseling and guidance programs to address the emotional, social, and behavioral needs of students.

In a research report detailing characteristics of successful alternative school practices, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) in 1995 pointed to program mission and goals as the main determiners of program success. According to SEDL findings, students in long-term programs improved more and performed better than students in short-term programs. The students participating in longer programs had more opportunity for individualized teacher instruction. Other features of effective programs included a positive climate, organizational structure geared to meet student needs, curriculum and instruction focused on everyday living skills, and links to community and health services (Jacobs, 1995; Morley, 1991, & Raywid; 1994). Successful programs focused on the needs of the whole student and actively sought to improve the student's personal, social, emotional, and academic development. Programs provided a warm, caring relationship among all personnel, parents, students, advisors, mentors, and other stakeholders; created a sense of belonging; held high expectations for student achievement, adapted teaching methods to meet student needs, maintained less than 1 to 10 teacher to student ratios, developed operating procedures unrelated to

the regular school program, included employment and vocational education components to designed to prepare students for life and work, and provided intensive counseling to help students with problems in and out of school. Programs functioned as a liaison to community health, social, and counseling services for families as well as individual students. Students in effective alternative programs had higher levels of confidence in the program and the ability of the program to meet their needs than students in traditional schools (Black, 1997; Yzaguirre, L. A. H., 1998).

Barr and Parrett (1997) and Raywid (1994) in a national survey of alternative programs found that the personal relationships alternative programs fostered between students and staff were more critical to student success than curriculum or instructional strategies. Caring teachers and staff provided students with more positive than negative experiences for building confidence and continued success (Boss, 1998; Harrington-Lueker, D., 1994).

In a study of alternative programs for students at risk of school failure and the attitudes of at risk parents, Tatum (1997) found that students credited belonging, achievement, individual attention, concern for others, and unconditionally caring teachers as important characteristics of successful programs. Parents pointed to the use of discipline as a learning concept, rather than as a punitive model as vital to student and program success. Parents also identified parent involvement, creative programming, community involvement, and a curriculum focused on teaching life skills as essential program components.

In 1999, Ron Stephens, Director of the National School Safety Center stated that students that do not thrive in the regular program need excellent, caring teachers that are well trained in behavior management, social skill development, and crisis management. The teachers and staff must be willing to work with the whole child and the whole family.

Gold and Mann (1984) in a study of delinquent youth in alternative program settings found that a change of setting from the regular home campus gave students who associated school with failure a new start. Students with discipline problems at the home campus often displayed less disruptive behavior in the alternative school setting. Successful programs provided a safe haven for students experiencing failure in school and at home (Raywid, 1994).

Unsuccessful Alternative Program Characteristics

While there are may successful alternative school programs, unsuccessful programs also exist. Kellmayer (1995) found that often, alternative programs consisted of less difficult models of traditional programs and were often used as holding quarters for students, rather than educational facilities. Warehouse-type programs are little different from traditional programs, other than maintaining strict, punitive discipline. Teachers and staff may function more as guards, rather than as caring, helpful, and supportive figures to students.

Barton (1998) stated that ineffective programs were large, had poor student attendance, no choice component, little community service involvement, inadequate or poorly trained staff, little stability, unclear discipline rules and procedures, drug and

alcohol concerns, and little or no parent and community involvement. The programs reinforced negative results and served as a constant reminder that today's traditional programs are imperfect (Ferrara, 1993). In such committees, the alternative program means failure. Raywid (1994) stated that some programs are viewed as places where losers, misfits, and disruptive students go when the traditional program expels them. Some programs become dumping grounds for students who cannot be molded to the regular program (Black, 1997; Jacobs, 1995).

Greg (1998) in a study of different kinds of alternative programs discovered that true education alternatives, not punishment, work best to improve both student behavior and achievement. So far, research on disciplinary programs and practices show no positive long term gains and may even increase negative outcomes. Narrow attitudes about at-risk students can lead to a school system that provides good schools for good kids and bad schools for bad kids, violating constitutional guarantees of equal protection.

Raywid (1994) compared success factors for alternative programs of choice, therapeutic programs, and disciplinary programs. Findings identified disciplinary alternative programs to be the least successful in rehabilitating students. The most successful programs proved to be programs of choice.

Conclusion

Alternative programs are many and varied. Effective programs tend to be small, child centered, individualized, flexible, and long term. Ineffective programs tend to be

large, punitive, modified traditional programs designed to remove the child from the main school program to safeguard the general student population (Ball, 1997).

Research shows that it is not what alternative programs teach, but how they work with students that makes the difference (Boss, 1998). Effective programs are built on choice and smallness. Choice promotes a sense of belonging and builds a sense of community where parents, educators, and parents work together to improve learning for students (Greg, 1995). Discipline alternative programs were the least effective type of alternative program offered and rarely led to significant gains for students (Raywid, 1994).

Methodology

An assessment approach was used to examine disciplinary alternative school practices of independent school districts in Texas. A survey soliciting disciplinary alternative program practices was developed using information derived from a literature review of best practices of alternative programs in the Nation.

The 1042 independent school district superintendents in Texas were mailed a survey in March, 1999. Respondents were asked to provide descriptive district and alternative program data. Survey data derived from the four hundred and seven returned surveys was analyzed for two separate groups, namely on- and off-campus programs. Descriptions of participants, instrumentation, and data analysis follow.

Participants

A survey soliciting disciplinary alternative program practices was developed and mailed to 1042 Texas independent school district superintendents in March, 1999. Four hundred and seven districts returned the survey representing a 39% return rate.

Instrumentation

A survey soliciting program practices of on- and off-campus disciplinary alternative programs was developed using information derived from a literature review of best practices for alternative programs in the Nation. The Director of Safe Schools at the Texas Education Agency was provided with a copy of the survey instrument and asked to suggest survey improvements. The revised instrument was field tested at one South Texas disciplinary alternative program. The researcher assigned the level of 60% or

greater for identifying best practices for Texas programs. Survey items receiving 60% or greater responses from districts and coincided with best practices revealed by the literature were deemed best practices for Texas programs.

Procedure and Design

In January, 1999 the Texas Education Agency offered grant opportunities to universities in the Texas A & M University System in the amount of $10,000. University Deans solicited requests for proposals for research grant funding and selected participants based on proposals submitted by university faculty. One of the grant proposals selected was research for determining best practices for disciplinary alternative programs in Texas. The disciplinary alternative program study and the survey instrument were approved by the Institutional Review Board for Texas A & M International University in February, 1999.

The first week in March, 1999 the survey was submitted to the Director of Safe Schools at the Texas Education Agency for review and modification and field tested at one South Texas disciplinary alternative program. Surveys were mailed to the 1042 independent school districts in Texas the last week in March, 1999. All surveys used in the study were returned by August 1, 1999. A return rate of 39% was realized.

Summary

A descriptive survey soliciting descriptive data of district and alternative school programs was analyzed using a survey instrument developed specifically for the purpose of soliciting practices of on- and off-campus alternative programs in Texas. The data

was analyzed for on- and off-campus programs and compiled for comparison of effective practices revealed by the literature. Survey items receiving a 60% or greater response and coincided with best practices revealed by the literature were deemed best practices for Texas programs.

Results

The results section of the study presents an analysis of the data collected. The results are organized into three sections. The first section presents the instrument return rate. Section two on data analysis presents a compilation of best disciplinary alternative program practices for on- and off-campus programs separately and together. Best practices for effective alternative programs were compiled. The third section compares compiled on- and off-campus survey data with best alternative program practices revealed by the literature.

Instrument Return Rate

A total of 1042 surveys were mailed to Texas school districts in March, 1999. Four hundred and seven districts returned the survey resulting in a 39% return rate. The data from returned surveys excluding fifteen surveys from districts reporting no disciplinary alternative program was analyzed.

Data Analysis

District survey information was compiled separately for on-campus and off-campus disciplinary alternative programs. Four hundred and seven districts of the 1042 districts in the state returned surveys representing a 39% return rate. One hundred and one on-campus and 291 off-campus disciplinary alternative program data was analyzed. Data analysis follows.

Table 1

On-Campus Disciplinary Alternative Program Data

Alternative Program Subject	101 District Responses	
Survey Statements	Number	Percentage
District Student Enrollment	20 to 54,183	
Transportation provided to and from program		
yes	35	34.7
no	28	27.7
Shared service agreement with other districts		
yes	11	10.9
no	70	69.3
Instructional arrangements in classrooms		
study carrels	60	59.4
traditional desk/chair in rows	33	32.7
tables for more than one student	17	16.8
other	6	5.9
Instructional delivery		
one-on-one with teacher	82	81.2

group instruction	33	32.7
computer-assisted instruction	35	34.7
peer tutoring	5	5.0
other	7	6.9
Program Planning		
individual student goals	54	53.5
overall district goals	48	47.5
needs assessment of student skills	36	35.6
establishment of long and short-term goals for students	41	40.6
other	2	2.0
Instruction		
academic program on grade level	69	68.3
academic program at each student's reading level	45	44.6
employment training	8	7.9
specific vocational training	3	3.0
conflict resolution training	39	38.6
social skills training	39	38.6
other	21	20.8

Teachers and Staff Data		
district teacher volunteers	19	18.8
district assigned staff	53	52.5
new teachers hired	29	28.7
other	4	4.0
pay incentive to teachers	15	14.9
no pay incentive to teachers	77	76.2
number of teachers	0 to 49	
number of instructional aides	0 to 38	
counselors	0 to 6	
daily services	7	6.9
weekly services	18	17.8
as needed	14	13.9
additional personnel	13	12.9
Teacher to Student Ratio		
1 teacher to 1 student	14	13.9
1 teacher to 5 students	39	38.6
1 teacher to 10 students	17	16.8
1 teacher to 15 students	22	21.8
1 teacher to 20 or more students	2	2.0

Teacher and Staff Training		
diversity training	29	28.7
conflict resolution training	64	63.4
social skills training	21	20.8
other	24	23.8
Instructional Delivery		
classroom teacher assignments	37	36.6
individual student instruction; one-on-one with teacher	44	43.6
self-paced workbooks	7	6.9
computer-assisted instruction	14	13.9
computer software used	34	33.7
cooperative, group instruction	5	5.0
peer tutoring	1	1.0
other	4	4.0
Parent Involvement		
parent present at entrance or exit conference	69	68.3
counseling provided for parents	25	24.8
parenting classes provided	9	9.0
parent volunteers used	9	9.0
other	12	11.9

Most successful activity or program in which parents participate	14	13.9
Transitional Program		
student returned to regular program with no follow-up	65	64.4
students receive counseling services within the regular program	36	35.6
students receive counseling after school	6	5.9
other	12	11.9
Agency Services		
juvenile probation	11	10.9
Texas Youth Commission	4	4.0
Health and Human Services	4	4.0
Texas Workforce Commission	2	2.0
Other	17	16.8
Criteria for Determining Alternative Program Success		
removal of disruptive students from regular program so that students in the traditional setting can succeed	59	58.4
success in mainstream program after return	69	68.3
no return trip to the alternative school program	43	42.6

reduced truancy and dropout rate	43	42.6
decreased court involvement	19	18.8
improved academic achievement	58	57.4
other	7	6.9

One hundred and one districts provided information on on-campus alternative programs. District student enrollments ranged from 20 students to 54,183 students.

Thirty-five or 34.7% of districts reported providing student transportation to and from the alternative program, while 28 or 27.7% of districts had no transportation provisions. Thirty-eight or 37.6% of districts chose not to report transportation data.

Shared service agreements with other districts were reported by 11 or 10.9% of districts, while 70 or 69.3% had no service agreement for alternative services. Twenty or 20% of districts did not report shared service agreement data.

The instruction arrangement most often used in alternative program classrooms was study carrels reported by 60 or 59.4% of districts. Six or 5.9% of districts reported other instruction arrangements, including computer stations, reading centers, and separate small tables and chairs.

One-on-one instruction with the teacher was the most commonly used instructional delivery method. Eighty-two or 81.2% used the one-on-one method of instruction with students.

Individual student goals was the most often used information for planning instructional programs for students in on-campus programs. Other criteria used to plan alternative programs was state tests and state graduation requirements.

Sixty-nine or 68.3% of districts instructed students at the students grade level. Forty-five or 44.6% of respondents reported instructing students at their functional reading level.

Fifty-three or 52.5% of respondents assigned teachers to work in the alternative program and 29 or 28.7% hired new teachers to teach in the program. Fifteen or 14.9% of districts provided a pay incentive to teachers agreeing to teach in the alternative program, while 77 or 76.2% of respondents offered no pay incentive.

The number of personnel serving on-campus alternative programs directly related to the number of students served by the program and varied as numbers of students increased or decreased. Personnel other than teachers, instructional aides and counselors mentioned by districts included principals, secretaries, security officers, intervention specialists, school psychologists, and custodians.

The most commonly used teacher to student ratio for on-campus alternative programs was one teacher to five students. Only two respondents claimed using one teacher to 20 students.

Teacher training consisted of mainly conflict resolution training required by the state. Additional staff development cited by districts included character education, social skills, crisis intervention, test taking skills, self-study skills, computer skills, and brain

research. Two districts mentioned sending teachers to alternative school conferences and to observe alternative programs in other districts as further training.

One-on-one instruction with the teacher was the most commonly used method of instructional delivery for on-campus programs. Peer tutoring and cooperative or group learning were the least used methods of instructional delivery. Thirty-four respondents used computer-assisted instruction as a method of instructional delivery. Software mentioned included New Century Academic Skills, PLATO, CCC, Skills Bank, NovaNet, Accelerated Reader, Destinations and INVEST. Four respondents cited hands on activities and a boot camp program as additional methods of instructional delivery.

Parent involvement in on-campus alternative programs was most commonly seen at entrance or exit conferences, with 69 or 68.3% of respondents requiring parent presence at the entrance or exit to the alternative program. Other forms of parent involvement activities included parent counseling, parent program volunteers, parent phone contact, alternative program class attendance, and conferences with regular program personnel. Nine districts mentioned providing parenting classes.

The most successful parent involvement activities or programs mentioned by districts included parenting classes, parent presence required at enrollment or exit conference, counseling, parent orientation to program, evening programs, meetings with the alternative program director, volunteer programs, on-going communication by phone or in person with parents about student progress, and inclusion of parents in planning the

child's guidance program. Eighty-seven of the 101 on-campus programs offered no successful parent involvement practices.

Sixty-five or 64.4% of respondents provided no transition program for students returning to the regular program. Counseling services for students in transition from the alternative program to the regular campus were provided to students through the regular program or after school.

The juvenile probation personnel provided counseling and monitoring services and was the most often mentioned agency providing services to students. Other outside agency services mentioned by respondents included the Texas Youth Commission, Heath and Human Resources, Texas Workforce Commission, Communities in Schools, drug and alcohol councils, family crisis centers, and law enforcement.

Success in the mainstream program and improved academic achievement were the most commonly mentioned indicators of alternative program success. Other indicators were removal of disruptive students from the regular program so that the majority of students have a chance to succeed, no return trip to the alternative program, reduced truancy, decreased court involvement, completion of credits toward a high school diploma, and continued improvement of social skills.

Data on off-campus programs was provided by 291 districts ranging in district student enrollment from 58 students to 211,197 students. Information collected from respondents using off-campus alternative programs follows.

Table 2

Off-Campus Disciplinary Alternative Program Data

Alternative Program Subject	291 District Responses	
Survey Statements	Number	Percentage
District Total Pre-K - 12 Enrollments	58 to 211,197	
Transportation provided to and from alternative program		
yes	145	49.8
no	140	48.1
Shared service agreement with other districts		
yes	127	43.6
no	158	54.3
Instructional arrangements in classrooms		
study carrels	193	66.3
traditional desk/chair in rows	140	48.1
tables for more than one student	106	36.4
other	30	10.3

Instructional delivery	218	74.9
one-on-one with teacher	169	58.1
group instruction	153	52.6
computer-assisted instruction	54	18.6
peer tutoring	5	1.7
other		
Program Planning		
individual student goals	208	71.5
overall district goals	194	66.7
needs assessment of student skills	136	46.7
establishment of long and short-term goals for students	122	41.9
other	2	.7
Instruction		
academic program on grade level	256	88.0
academic program at each student's reading level	191	65.6
employment training	49	16.8
specific vocational training	33	11.3
conflict resolution training	188	64.6
social skills training	179	61.5

other	22	7.6
Teachers and Staff Data		
district teacher volunteers	51	17.5
district assigned staff	28	9.6
new teachers hired	175	60.1
other	1	.3
pay incentive to teachers	42	14.4
no pay incentive to teachers	215	73.9
number of teachers	1 to 51	
number of instructional aides	1 to 18	
number of counselors	1 to 6	
daily services	38	13.0
weekly services	90	30.9
as needed	13	4.5
Teacher to Student Ratio		
1 teacher to 1 student	7	2.4
1 teacher to 5 students	84	28.9
1 teacher to 10 students	111	38.1
1 teacher to 15 students	59	20.3
1 teacher to 20 or more students	14	4.8

Teacher and Staff Training	114	39.2
diversity training	189	64.9
conflict resolution training	123	42.3
social skills training	17	5.8
other		
Instructional Delivery		
classroom teacher assignments	32	11.0
individual student instruction; one-on-one with teacher	20	6.9
self-paced workbooks	34	11.7
computer-assisted instruction	30	10.3
computer software used	96	33.0
cooperative, group instruction	30	10.3
peer tutoring	41	14.1
other		
Parent Involvement		
parent present at entrance or exit conference	231	79.4
counseling provided to parents	88	30.2
parenting classes provided	133	45.7
parent volunteers used	50	17.2
other	6	2.1

Most successful activity or program in which parents participate	25	8.6
Transitional Program		
student returned to regular program with no follow-up	182	62.5
students receive counseling services within the regular program	109	37.5
students receive counseling after school	20	6.9
other	0	0
Agency Services		
juvenile probation	144	49.5
Texas Youth Commission	12	4.1
Health and Human Services	50	17.2
Texas Workforce Commission	13	4.5
Other	64	22.0
Criteria for Determining Alternative Program Success		
removal of disruptive students from regular program so that students in the traditional setting can succeed	160	55.0
success in mainstream program after return	218	75.0

no return trip to the alternative school program	223	76.6
reduced truancy and dropout rate	157	54.0
decreased court involvement	76	26.1
improved academic achievement	183	62.9
other	3	1.0

Of the 291 districts providing information on transportation to off-campus alternative programs, 145 or 49.8% provided transportation and 140 or 48.1% provided no transportation. Six districts did not provide a response to transportation. Some districts noted that transportation was provided for special education students when required by the Admissions, Review, and Dismissal Committee.

Shared service agreements were reported by 127 or 43.6% of districts. One hundred and fifty-eight districts or 54.3% of respondents did not participate in a shared service agreement. Six districts did not respond to the shared service agreement statements on the survey.

The most commonly used classroom arrangement in the alternative program was study carrels for 193 or 66.3% of respondents. Other instructional arrangements used included traditional desk/chair arrangement in rows, tables for more than one student, computer tables, desk and chairs arranged in a horseshoe shape, dividers, sections or cubicles, and individual rooms.

The most used instructional delivery method used by respondents was one-on-one instruction with the teacher. The least used method was peer tutoring. Other instructional delivery methods used by respondents included high school and junior high curriculum materials, videos, modules, teacher-prepared materials, assignments from the home campus, self-paced packets, small group instruction, and distance learning. Computer programs used by districts reporting computer-assisted instruction as an instructional method used PLATO, Self-Esteem, Respect and Values, American Preparatory Institute materials, Microsoft Works and Word, INVEST, NovaNet, PACE, CCC, Life Math, Off the Shelf, Texas Assessment of Academic Skills Test tutorials, Destinations, A+, Skills Bank, SLEEK, and Jostens hardware and software.

Individual student goals were used to plan student instruction by 208 or 71.5% of the responding districts and overall district goals were used for planning by 194 or 66.7% of districts. Other information used for program planning included student needs assessments, short- and long-term goal planning, daily personal behavior goals, the graduation plan, student performance data reported on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills tests, campus goals, special education individual educational plans for special education students, behavior goals, social skill goals, and grade level curriculum requirements.

Two hundred fifty-six or 88.0% of the districts taught students at the academic grade level, while 191 or 65.6% taught students using the student's functional reading level. Other training mentioned by respondents included conflict resolution training,

social skills training, vocational training, and positive behavior training. Social skills training materials used by 94 districts included Boys Town materials, Reconnecting Youth, Success in Thinking Skills, Second Step, Positive Peer Culture, teacher-prepared lessons, NovaNet, Changing Direction, Aggression Replacement, Gateway Program, New Focus, Positive Steps boot camp, community service, credit recovery, drug and alcohol programs, guest speakers from Texas Youth Commission, , Boy Scout materials, self discipline, social responsibility, and self esteem materials.

One hundred seventy-five or 60.1% of districts hired new teachers to staff the alternative program. Additional methods of securing staff included hiring substitute teachers as needed, hiring teachers through the credit recovery program, hiring teachers from a pool of interested applicants, and hiring retired teachers. Forty-two or 14.4% offered a pay incentive to teachers for working at the alternative campus.

The number of teachers, instructional aides, and counselors varied depending on student enrollment. The teacher to student ratio maintained by 111 or 38.1% of districts was 1 to 10. Only 14 or 4.8% of districts maintained a teacher to student ratio of 1 to 20 or greater.

Conflict resolution was the most common form of teacher training provided by districts with 189 or 64.9% of districts providing some form of conflict resolution training as required by state law. Other training provided teachers included training in teaching social skills, character development, brain research methods, classroom management methods, use of integrated learning system hardware and software, working with

students with conduct disorders, crisis prevention and intervention, curriculum development, drug and alcohol prevention, ethnic awareness, effective school methods, Glasser's choice theory methods, special education modification methods, to name a few.

The most often used method of instructional delivery used in off-campus alternative programs was one-on-one student instruction with a teacher with regular classroom teacher assignments most commonly used for instructional delivery second. One hundred districts providing computer-assisted instruction delivery used PLATO or NovaNet software.

Parent presence at the entrance or exit conference for placement in the alternative school was the most common method used by districts to communicate with parents with 231 or 79.4% of the respondents requiring an entrance or exit conference with parents. Parenting classes were offered by 133 or 45.7% of the districts. Other parent involvement activities included parent volunteers, parent counseling, instruction provided by community agencies, instruction provided through federal programs, programs provided by Communities in Schools, district parents, district counselors, social workers, and the parent-teacher organization.

Programs and activities involving parents and reported as successful by 25 or 8.6% of districts and included campus level conferences, parent surveys, parent training, drug and gang counseling, shadowing for non-compliant youth, and frequent verbal and written communication.

One hundred eight-two or 62.5% of respondents indicated having no transitional program for students from the alternative school back to the regular campus. One hundred and nine districts provided counseling services after students returned to the regular school program. Other transitional activities including monitoring student success for a period of time after the student returned to the regular campus. Alternative program staff functioned as resource people for students for problem solving.

Districts pointed to the juvenile probation system as the agency most involved with alternative school students. Probation officers monitored student attendance, academic progress, and behavior. Other agencies that contributed services to schools included the Texas Youth Commission, Health and Human Services, and the Texas Workforce Commission.

Two hundred and twenty-three districts or 76.6% pointed to no return trip to the alternative program as the most common indicator used by districts to determine alternative program success. Other success indicators included success in the regular program, reduced student truancy, decreased student court appearances, improved academic achievement, credit recovery, graduation, improved behavior in the regular program, and improved social skills in the regular program.

Table 3

On- and off-campus disciplinary alternative program data

Alternative Program Subject	392 District Responses	
Survey Statements	Number	Percentage
District Total Pre-K - 12 Enrollments	20 to 211,197	
Transportation provided to and from alternative program		
yes	180	46.0
no	168	42.9
Shared service agreement with other districts		
yes	138	35.2
no	228	58.2
Instructional arrangements in classrooms		
study carrels	253	64.5
traditional desk/chair in rows	173	44.1
tables for more than one student	123	31.4
other	36	9.2
Instructional delivery		
one-on-one with teacher	300	76.5

group instruction	202	51.5
computer-assisted instruction	188	48.0
peer tutoring	59	15.1
other	12	3.1
Program Planning		
individual student goals	262	66.8
overall district goals	242	61.7
needs assessment of student skills	172	43.9
establishment of long and short-term goals for students	163	41.6
other	4	1.0
Instruction		
academic program on grade level	325	83.0
academic program at each student's reading level	236	60.2
employment training	57	14.5
specific vocational training	36	9.2
conflict resolution training	227	58.0
social skills training	218	56.0
other	43	11.0

Teachers and Staff Data	70	17.9
district teacher volunteers	81	21.0
district assigned staff	204	52.0
new teachers hired	5	1.3
other	57	14.5
pay incentive to teachers	292	74.5
no pay incentive to teachers	0 to 51	
number of teachers	0 to 18	
number of instructional aides	0 to 6	
number of counselors	45	11.5
daily services	108	28.0
weekly services	27	7.0
as needed	69	17.6
additional personnel		
Teacher to Student Ratio		
1 teacher to 1 student	21	5.4
1 teacher to 5 students	123	34.4
1 teacher to 10 students	128	32.7
1 teacher to 15 students	81	21.0
1 teacher to 20 or more students	16	4.1

Teacher and Staff Training	143	36.5
diversity training	253	64.5
conflict resolution training	144	36.7
social skills training	41	10.5
other		
Instructional Delivery		
classroom teacher assignments	69	17.6
individual student instruction; one-on-one with teacher	64	16.3
self-paced workbooks	41	10.5
computer-assisted instruction	44	11.2
computer software used	130	33.2
cooperative, group instruction	35	8.9
peer tutoring	42	10.7
other		
Parent Involvement		
parent present at entrance or exit conference	300	76.5
counseling provided to parents	113	28.8
parenting classes provided	142	36.2
parent volunteers used	59	15.1
other	18	5.0

Most successful activity or program in which parents participate	39	9.9
Transitional Program		
student returned to regular program with no follow-up	247	63.0
students receive counseling services within the regular program	145	37.0
students receive counseling after school	26	6.6
other	12	3.1
Agency Services		
juvenile probation	155	39.5
Texas Youth Commission	16	4.1
Health and Human Services	54	14.0
Texas Workforce Commission	15	3.8
Other	81	21.0
Criteria for Determining Alternative Program Success		
removal of disruptive students from regular program so that students in the traditional setting can succeed	219	56.0
success in mainstream program after return	287	73.2

no return trip to the alternative school program	266	68.0
reduced truancy and dropout rate	200	51.0
decreased court involvement	95	24.2
improved academic achievement	241	61.5
other	10	3.0

Best Practices of Alternative Programs

Through a review of the literature, a number of best practices for alternative programs were compiled. A list of best practices follows.

Table 4

Best practices of alternative programs

Subject	Best Practice Descriptors
Program Characteristics	clearly developed mission for the student group served
	efficient and structured learning environment focused on achievement and success
	assessment of each student's functional academic skills and learning needs as prerequisite to planning and implementing instruction
	helps students develop the capacity to succeed and

	meet high expectations
	use of instructional strategies that work with a variety of student, such as hands-on learning, cooperative learning, and experimental learning
	maintenance of a low pupil to teacher ratio, no more than 15 students to one teacher, with 10 students to one teacher the optimum ratio
	developed locally and collaboratively between teachers and staff at the alternative program and teachers and staff at the regular program
	appropriate staff and resources for students with disabilities
	described as successful by more than one source
	serves students for more than one semester
Curriculum and Instruction	focused and flexible delivery of functional academic skills using nontraditional methods
	self-paced and individualized instruction
	characterized by innovation, variety, experimentation
	includes instruction in social and daily living skills
	includes preparation for the world of work
	relevant to student interests and intellectually

	challenging
	relevant to the economic and social realities of students' personal lives and communities
	underlying goal of improving student attitudes, behavior, and self esteem through successful experiences
	comprehensive and continuing
Teachers and Staff	characterized as caring, dedicated, skilled, optimistic, and accountable for student success
	see themselves in expanded roles of mentor, nurturer, counselor, and advisor as well as teacher
	believe in educating the whole child
	maximize student achievement
	collaborate with colleagues to increase student success
Teacher and Staff Training	instruction in conflict resolution
	working with diversity
	instruction in discipline management
	training in anger management
Discipline	clear, strict, and fair discipline code, including a dress code

	provides positive and negative consequences for student actions
	used more as a learning tool to improve student attitudes, behavior, and self esteem
	provides a training component for in coping skills, self control, and problem solving
Transitional Component	activities and procedures that tie the alternative program to the regular school program
	tracks students with follow-up activities and procedures after they return to the home campus
Parent Involvement	encourages and promotes parent involvement in the student's educational program
	encourages parent attendance at workshops on parenting, coping skills, and a variety of other topics geared at improving family life
	encourages and promotes parent volunteers as academic tutors, aides to staff, and assistance in a variety of programs as needed
Community Services	available through the juvenile justice system, health and human services system, and systems focused on providing training to youth in everyday living

	skills, employment training, career training
	vocational training, and other available services
Counseling	commitment of teachers, staff, and administration to
	intensive student counseling and family counseling
	provides for positive peer and adult mentoring
	provides avenues and direction to student and family
	services available through a variety of community
	and state programs

Summary

Three hundred and ninety-two districts disciplinary alternative program surveys were analyzed to determine best practices for Texas programs. Best practices derived from a literature review of alternative programs in the Nation were identified and compared with data for Texas programs. Survey statements receiving 60% or grater responses and deemed best practices by the literature were determined to be best practices for disciplinary alternative programs in Texas.

Results, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter summaries the findings of the study on best practices of disciplinary alternative programs in Texas. The conclusions drawn from the data enabled the researcher to suggest recommendations for improvement of disciplinary alternative programs.

Results

A survey soliciting disciplinary alternative program practices was developed and mailed to 1042 Texas independent school district superintendents. Survey data for one hundred and one on-campus and two hundred 291 off-campus programs was compiled to reveal common practices of Texas programs as compared with best practices in the Nation as revealed by a literature review of alternative programs.

Findings revealed the following best practices of Texas alternative programs: (1) use of one-on-one instruction with the teacher (76.5%), (2) establishment of individual student goals for program planning (66.8%), (3) academic program at each student's functional reading level (60.2%), (4) staff development for teachers in conflict resolution (64.5%), (5) parent involvement in the entrance or exit conference for the program (76.5%), (6) goal of success in the mainstream program after return to the home campus (73.2%), (7) no return trip to the alternative program (68.0%), and (8) improved academic achievement (61.5%),

Conclusions

Conclusions of the study follow.

1. Texas best alternative program practices reflect the mandates required by the Texas Education Code for disciplinary alternative schools.
2. Program purpose determines the type of alternative program provided by districts.
3. Eight best practices for disciplinary alternative schools in Texas were identified through a compilation of data from 392 district surveys and a literature review revealing best practices.

Recommendations

Texas districts are mandated by law to implement disciplinary alternative programs for students who are removed from the regular program for disruptive behavior and for offenses outlined in Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code and the Texas Penal Code. Recommendations for program improvement follow.

1. If rehabilitate of disruptive and violent students is to occur, state program goals must focus on rehabilitation, rather than discipline.
2. Designated funding for rehabilitative alternative programs might encourage districts to implement programs to help students succeed in life as well as the traditional program.
3. An increase in parent involvement in alternative programs might occur, if programs were rehabilitative, rather than punitive.

4. Staff development for alternative program teachers might include intensive training for working with troubled youth.
5. Counseling services for troubled youth might increase student success.
6. Transition programs for students returning to the regular campus after placement in the alternative program might increase student success in the regular program.
7. Comprehensive instruction in behavior management might increase student success in the regular program.
8. Follow-up programs to determine alternative program success might be conducted over time might be beneficial.

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Appendix

Disciplinary Alternative School Program Survey

April, 1999

I. District Statistics

Pre-K - 12 Enrollment: _____

District ethnicity and gender percentages for the 97-98 school year.

_____White_____Black_____Hispanic_____Other

_____female_____male

Alternative School Student Statistics

Pre-K - 12 Enrollment: _____

Alternative school ethnicity and gender percentages for the 97-98 school year.

_____White_____Black_____Hispanic_____Other

_____female_____male

Instructional Arrangement

Type of instructional arrangement used by the district for the alternative school:
(Please check the appropriate blank.)

_____On-Campus Program

_____Off-Campus Program Transportation provided:_____Yes____No

Does your district participate in a shared service agreement with other districts in providing discipline, alternative school services?
(Please check "Yes" or "No".)

_____Yes _____No

Instructional arrangement in classrooms at the alternative school:
(Please check those that apply.)

_____study carrels

_____traditional desk/chair in rows

_____tables where more than one student sits

_____other (Please specify below.)

Instructional Delivery

Our alternative school delivers instruction using the following methods:

_____one-on-one with teacher

_____group instruction with teacher

_____computer-assisted instruction (Please specify program_____)

_____peer tutoring

_____other (Please specify below.)

Students Programs

Alternative school programming is based on one or more of the following:

_____individual student goals

_____overall district goals

_____other (Please specify below.)

_____needs assessment of student skills

_____establishment of long and short-term goals for the student

_____other (Please specify below.)

Alternative school programming for students includes the following:
(Please check those that apply.)

_____academic program on grade level

_____academic programs at each student's reading level

_____employment training

_____specific vocational training

_____conflict resolution training

_____social skills training (Please specify program below.)

_____other (Please specify below.)

Teachers and Staff

How did you select teachers for the alternative school? (Please check those that apply.)

_____district teacher volunteers

_____district assigned staff

_____hired new teachers for the school

_____other (Please explain.)

Is a pay incentive offered to teachers willing to teach in the alternative school?

_____Yes

_____No

How many staff are provided for the alternative school?

_____teachers

_____instructional aides

_____counselor How often_____

What is the average student - teacher ratio in the alternative school program? (Please check one.)

_____1 teacher to 1 student

_____1 teacher to 5 students

_____1 teacher to 10 students

_____1 teacher and to 15 students

_____1 teacher to 20 or more students

Do alternative school teachers and staff receive staff development in one or more of the following areas?

_____diversity training

_____conflict resolution

_____social skill (Please specify program.)_____

_____other (Please specify below.)

Instructional methods

Which instructional method is most effective with students sent to alternative school for disciplinary reasons? (Please rank effectiveness from 1 being the most effective to 7 being the least effective.)

_____classroom teacher assignments (Assignments sent to student from regular campus)

_____individual student instruction with one-on-one contact with teacher

_____self-paced workbooks for academic subjects

_____computer-assisted instruction. Please identify

program:_____

_____cooperative, group instruction

_____peer tutoring

_____other Please explain._____

Parent Involvement

How are parents involved in the alternative program?
(Please check only those that apply.)

_____Parent presence required at enrollment and exit conferences.

_____Counseling provided for parents _____and/or student _____.
(Please check one or both, if apply)

_____Parenting classes provided. (If classes provided, who provides the

service?)_____

_____Parent volunteer participation in the program

_____Other - (Please explain below.)

If parent involvement is part of the program, what seems to be the most successful activity or program in which parents participate?
(Please specify and explain if applicable.)

Transitional Programs

What kind of transitional programs are provided for students moving from alternative school back to the regular school campus?

_____Students return to regular program after serving time for offense with no specifically planned follow-up.

_____Students receive counseling services within the regular school program.

How often?_____

_____Students receive after-school counseling services thorough an agency.

How often and what agency?_____

_____Other Please name the agency or agencies and give the frequency of

services._____
Agency Services

Which of the following agencies provide support services for the alternative school program? (Please check those that apply.)

___juvenile probation: What service(s)_____

___Texas Youth Commission: What service(s)_____

___Health and Human Services: What service(s)_____

___Texas Workforce Commission: What service(s)_____

___Other community agency service(s) : What service(s)_____

What criteria do you use to determine alternative school success?
(Please check those phrases that apply.)

_____removal of disruptive students from traditional setting, so that students in traditional setting can succeed

_____success in mainstream program, after return

_____no return trip to the alternative school program

_____reduced truancy and dropout rate

_____decreased court involvement

_____improved academic achievement

_____other Please specify._____